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U.S.-Malaysia Security Relations and the East Asian Region

In a May 2002 speech in Washington, D.C., Defense Minister Dato Sri Najib Tun Razak discussed what he called a very well-kept secret: the success of U.S.-Malaysia defense cooperation. He explained that:

“Historically, Malaysia has been a steady, reliable friend of the United States. Our multitude of common interests include trade and investment on a sizeable scale and security cooperation across a range of fronts. An equally important point is the common values our two countries share, including a commitment to democracy, religious tolerance, and equality for all our diverse citizens. In times like these...it is these values that bind nations together.”

Taking my cue from Dato Sri Najib, I'd like to explore with you some of the interests in regional security that the U.S. and Malaysia share in common, and I'll begin by discussing some of the non-military components of East Asian regional security because they are often the most important.

Economic Development and Security

The most important non-military component of regional security is economic growth and prosperity. This is probably the strongest common bond between the U.S. and Malaysia. Economic development has always been a key element in American security strategy. We have always recognized that people who hope to improve their lives by growing richer and more comfortable are more likely to establish a stable domestic political order and pursue peaceful policies abroad. Soon after World War II we provided Western Europe with billions of dollars in assistance under the Marshall Plan. We provided hundreds of billions of dollars in economic assistance to the developing world during and after the Cold War. We also

opened our markets so that developing countries could export to the U.S., expand their own industrial base, and participate in the liberal international economic order.

This approach has been particularly successful in East Asia. We are all familiar with the phenomenal economic success of Japan and the four “East Asian Tigers” – South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Surely these countries owe their economic success to the ingenuity and hard work of their own people. But the U.S. has been there to help too. We started by providing assistance in the 1950s and 60s. We opened our markets to their exports and invested heavily in their economies. Today, these five countries are all among the world’s largest 45 economies. Malaysia has also benefited greatly from the post World War II liberal international trading order. I suspect you all know that Malaysia is the world’s 41st largest economy, with the second highest per capita GDP in Southeast Asia. Malaysia and the U.S. have enjoyed extremely close economic relations, with two-way trade of 44 billion dollars in 2007. The U.S. is Malaysia’s best customer, buying more Malaysian exports than any other country. Malaysia is also America’s sixteenth largest trading partner, and the U.S. direct investment position in Malaysia is nearly \$12.5 billion.

As the Malaysian and other East Asian economies have grown, so has stability spread throughout the region. There has not been an inter-state armed conflict in East Asia since the Cambodian peace settlement in 1991 – that’s almost twenty years of peace and prosperity without a regional war.

Multilateral Institutions

We also share an interest with Malaysia in promoting regional multilateral forums such as APEC, the East Asian Summit, and ASEAN. In a recent book on American foreign policy Henry Kissinger described East Asia as a region in which balance of power considerations predominate even after the end of the Cold War. If East Asia remains a balance of power theater, the rise of multilateral groupings in the region have certainly provided numerous alternative ways of seeking that balance. The earliest regional grouping not led by the U.S. was ASEAN, founded in 1967. ASEAN added dialogue partners in 1977. APEC first met in 1989; the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994; the ASEAN+3 in 1997; and the East Asian Summit in 2005.

In many ways, ASEAN has become the hub of regional integration efforts and remains at the heart of organizations responding to security challenges in the Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN is critically important to us. Today, ASEAN collectively constitutes our 4th largest export market and represents one of the most rapidly growing and dynamic economies in the world. We have witnessed tremendous growth in our trade, which topped \$168 billion in 2006. U.S. private investment in ASEAN is nearing \$90 billion. ASEAN has of course not achieved the level of economic integration that the EU has achieved. Nor has the region established a “security community,” as most of Western and Central Europe has. As China, India, Japan, and the U.S. seek influence in the region, I hope that ASEAN will provide Southeast Asia not only with a hub for regional integration efforts, but with the geopolitical weight it needs to avoid fragmentation and maintain peace and stability.

The U.S. strongly backs the role that ASEAN plays in the region, and we have tried to strengthen our ties to that organization. This past year we celebrated 30 years of U.S. –ASEAN relations, and we are moving forward with an enhanced U.S.-ASEAN partnership that is supporting ASEAN’s work in the areas like natural disaster response management and science and technology development. We like the way that the ASEAN countries conduct relationships among themselves and with other regional powers. Although we have not signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, the Bush administration has registered unambiguous support for the spirit of that agreement and the pattern of international relations it embodies. We think that the South China Sea Code of Conduct, concluded by ASEAN and China in 2002, represents an important and creative way of dealing with regional territorial conflicts.

With regard to the larger multilateral groups like the East Asia Summit, the challenge will be finding a way to connect the pan-Asian and trans-Pacific groupings like APEC. Both would benefit from creating a linkage that provides synergy and avoids redundancy. Both are legitimate organizing principles, and the trans-Pacific organization overlaps the pan-Asian one.

Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Humanitarian Relief

The U.S. continues to believe that UN peacekeeping plays a vital role in stabilizing important conflicts, and we have played a significant role in

UN peacekeeping operations. The U.S. is the largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget -- providing roughly a quarter of the total cost to operate all peacekeeping missions. The U.S. provides military training and logistical support for peacekeeping operations. The U.S. works closely with other UN Member States to ensure peacekeeping mission mandates are clear, credible, limited to what is achievable, and that peacekeeping personnel are properly prepared, able to defend themselves, and able to fulfill their mandate. Currently, the United States provides military observers and UN police for eight peacekeeping missions. In recent years, the United States has taken a leading role in urging the UN to take preventive measures in response to several reports of sexual exploitation and abuse involving UN peacekeeping personnel.

The U.S. and Malaysia have a strong common interest in peacemaking and peacekeeping around the world. The U.S. has welcomed and supported the dispatch of Malaysian peacekeepers in such UN operations as the UN Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM); the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC); the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina; the UN Observer Mission in Kosovo (UNOMIK); and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Closer to home, the U.S. was encouraged by Malaysian participation in the Aceh Monitoring Mission following the peace agreement there; the International Monitoring Team (IMT) in Mindanao; and Operation Astute in East Timor. We have cooperated particularly closely with the IMT in Mindanao, and we hope that Malaysia will maintain this role in the Southern Philippines to help assure the success of the current peace talks between Manila and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) program has given the MAF the opportunity to train not only Malaysian forces but third country militaries to current UN standards. The mission of GPOI is to develop a self-sustained training and evaluation system. In Malaysia, the primary platform is the Malaysian Peacekeeping Training Center (MPTC) which has facilitated the development of peacekeeping capabilities and increased the pool of qualified international peacekeepers. Trailblazing programs like the UN Logistics Course, Peace Support Officers Instructor Course, Civil-Military Coordination Course, and the UN Staff Officer Course have trained 80 Malaysians and 52 international officers in the past year. Next year's GPOI courses will provide this vital training to over 180 officers and will host the UN Military Observer Course. Due to MPTC's standard of

excellence, the US Pacific Command has recognized the Center as the most active Peacekeeping Operations training venue in Southeast Asia.

Malaysia is in a central location in the Asia Pacific region for storing humanitarian relief supplies and has a well developed infrastructure with a competent and professional Armed Forces and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to facilitate swift movement of the supplies. This was demonstrated in the Yogyakarta quake response where a 56-member Special Malaysia Disaster Assistance and Relief Team (SMART) and five doctors and paramedics from the Kuala Lumpur Hospital and the Armed Forces arrived within 24 hours to the disaster area bringing with them medicine and emergency essentials to be distributed to the victims. The country is peaceful and stable, with no major natural disasters beyond flooding. Additionally, Malaysia has the capability and track record of providing quick response and humanitarian assistance to affected countries in the region and throughout the world. Malaysia believes in not just providing response and relief, but recovery and rehabilitation as well, as seen in the Aceh relief operations. Currently the U.S. is working with Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) on plans for Subang Air Force Base to be a regional humanitarian relief center where Malaysia can participate on a cost sharing basis by providing the facility and manpower to transport, store, and manage humanitarian relief supplies and equipment, some of which will be provided by the U.S.

Counter-terrorism and Transnational Crime

The U.S. and Malaysia, along with other countries in the region, have worked together closely to fight terrorists. Since September 11, 2001, the relationships between the countries of Southeast Asia and the United States have taken on new meaning and importance. The events of that day brought home to many nations the reality that terrorism is a crime that does not respect national borders. Today, terrorists are using more and more the same advantages and methods as other forms of international criminals such as drug traffickers, pirates, smugglers and those who traffic in human beings. These activities exceed the national interest of any one nation and are inherently international in scope. In order to fight terrorism and these other crimes effectively, countries must be willing to engage one another and implement joint strategies for the security of their region and beyond.

We are seeking to promote greater multilateral efforts in the region. What is happening in the tri-border area of Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia -- in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas -- is a prime example of the need to coordinate efforts and responses. Terrorist groups are known to transit the area and utilize many of the same routes and methods as alien smugglers. One affected country cannot prevent this activity if it is able to continue in the neighboring states. The United States is working with each of these nations to provide them with the means to strengthen their own capabilities but is doing so in the context of a regional effort. We recognize that Malaysia has invested a great deal to bolster its maritime border security in this area since the year 2000, for example through the Ops Pasir deployment of military forces to islands in the Sulu Sea. Our provision of 12 million dollars this year for the construction of coastal radars in Eastern Sabah is an effort to bolster Malaysian capabilities in a way that is consistent with similar efforts by the Philippines and Indonesia. We also are working on building a closer relationship between the U.S. Coast Guard and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA).

We are encouraged by Malaysia's leading role in security in the Straits of Malacca, particularly through the "Eyes in Sky Program" and note the apparent success in securing the Straits as evidenced by fewer incidents of piracy. I hope that efforts underway to reach agreements with Malaysia's neighbors on interdicting identified criminals move forward quickly. Cooperation in this area may provide effective models for cooperation elsewhere. Just as we recognize the importance of each nation's individual sovereignty in dealing with the fight on terror, we understand that regions themselves must be able to undertake the efforts necessary to safeguard their borders and help their neighbors.

Military-to-Military Relations

We are also working hard to strengthen bilateral security relations with countries in the region. The U.S. military and law enforcement agencies offer large amounts of training and material designed to build military capabilities that will improve local military and law enforcement ability to counter criminals and terrorists. Over the past five years in Malaysia alone, the United States has provided more than 8 million dollars in assistance for military equipment and training of more than 650 Malaysian military personnel. The focus is to help build each nation's capacity to fight their battles against terrorism and international crime.

This takes place within the context of a long tradition of productive military-to-military relations between the U.S. and Malaysia. We continue to increase our military to military engagement portfolio adding on more ship visits, staff visits, VIP visits, escort of MOD/MFA officials to the United States, more co-hosted events/conferences with MAF, as well as various Subject Matter Expert Exchanges (SMEEs). American and Malaysian forces have trained and exercised together at least since the 1960's, when Malaysia dispatched personnel to Vietnam. Ship visits have increased dramatically over the past few years, and in 2007 Malaysia welcomed 24 U.S. Navy ships at Langkawi, Port Klang, and Kota Kinabalu. We co-hosted the first ever Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference last year involving 18 military intelligence chiefs from around the region. We are exploring options to once again conduct Cope Taufan annually instead of every two years. We conducted 14 exercises and training events for Malaysian military forces throughout Peninsular Malaysia last year.

Conclusion

I hope that I have given you a sense of how extensive the U.S.-Malaysia security relationship is. Malaysia is important to the U.S. because, as Dato Sri Najib has said, we share common values, including commitments to democracy, religious tolerance, and equality for all our diverse citizens. Malaysia is also a major American trading partner, an important oil and gas producer, and a strategic gateway between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. While we expect that the region will evolve considerably over the coming decade, including dealing with the rise of a strong, economically vigorous China, we expect that the U.S. and Malaysia will continue to share key values and security interests, and that our relationship will continue to strengthen.